

Perception of occupational stress by military firefighters from a city in the countryside of Minas Gerais

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RESEARCH

PERCEPTION OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS BY MILITARY FIREFIGHTERS FROM A CITY IN THE
COUNTRYSIDE OF MINAS GERAIS
PERCEPÇÃO DO ESTRESSE OCUPACIONAL POR BOMBEIROS MILITARES DE UMA CIDADE DO INTERIOR
DE MINAS GERAIS
PERCEPCIÓN DEL ESTRÉS OCUPACIONAL POR BOMBEROS MILITARES DE UNA CIUDAD DEL INTERIOR DE
MINAS GERAIS

Natália Gomes Vicente¹, Lúcia Aparecida Ferreira², Marina Pereira Rezende³, Ricardo Jader Cardoso⁴,
Fernanda Bonato Zuffi⁵

ABSTRACT

Objective: to identify the factors those predispose the military fireman to develop occupational stress. **Method:** this was a descriptive study, with quantitative and qualitative approach. 32 interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire and an interview recorded with guiding questions. The data were analyzed using the SPSS 16.0 version and for the interviews was used content analysis. **Results:** Seven categories namely: understanding stress, stress in daily work; factors stressors and emotional damage due to stress. **Conclusion:** It was noticed in this study the difficulty of theoretical science on this subject. Moreover, we can infer that concern firefighters, feel and express stress in different ways and thus to realize when they are under job stress. **Descriptors:** Professional Exhaustion, Workers' Health, Nursing.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar fatores que predispõe o bombeiro militar a desenvolver estresse ocupacional. **Método:** Trata-se de um estudo descritivo, com abordagem quanti-qualitativa. Foram realizadas 32 entrevistas sendo utilizado um questionário semi-estruturado e uma entrevista gravada com as perguntas norteadoras. Os dados foram analisados utilizando o programa SPSS versão 16.0 e para as entrevistas utilizou-se análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** emergiram sete categorias: entendimento de estresse; estresse no cotidiano de trabalho; relacionamento interpessoal; fatores estressores; significado do sofrimento alheio; dano emocional e conflitos. **Conclusão:** Percebeu-se neste estudo a dificuldade de encontrar referencial teórico científico a respeito da referida temática. Ademais, pode-se inferir que os bombeiros militares referem, sentem e manifestam o estresse de diferentes maneiras e, portanto, conseguem perceber quando estão sob estresse ocupacional. **Descritores:** Esgotamento Profissional, Saúde do trabalhador, Enfermagem.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar los factores que predisponen el bombero militar a desarrollar estrés ocupacional. **Método:** Se trata de un estudio descriptivo, con abordaje cuanti-calitativa. Fueron realizadas 32 entrevistas siendo utilizado un cuestionario seme-estructurado y una entrevista grabada con las preguntas nuerteadoras. Los datos fueron analizados utilizando el programa SPSS versión 16.0 y para las entrevistas se utilizó analice de contenido. **Resultados:** emergieron siete categorías: entendimiento de estrés; estrés en el cotidiano de trabajo; relacionamiento interpersonal; factores estresores; significado del sufrimiento ajeno; daño emocional y conflictos. **Conclusión:** se percibió en este estudio dificultades de identificar referencial teórico científico a respecto de la referida temática. Además, se puede inferir que los bomberos militares refieren, sienten y manifiestan el estrés de diferentes modos y, por lo tanto, consiguen percibir cuando están bajo estrés ocupacional. **Descriptores:** Agotamiento Profesional, Salud Laboral, Enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

The Organic Law of 8080/90 has defined occupational health as a set of practices that seek the promotion and maintenance of health, prevention of accidents and injuries arising from work activity, recovery and rehabilitation of workers, through epidemiological surveillance and sanitary¹. From it is that there was a further development of nursing work. The nurse's job is to worry about the physical and mental well being of the employee, being aware of the factors predisposing to the disease.

An important public servant is the professional Firefighter Military. In his professional activity endangers his life to save and protect the lives of others as well as public or private assets of the company. According to Article 9, the 39th Amendment to the Constitution of the State, Item II says that competes:

[...] To the Fire Brigade, coordination and execution of actions of civil defense, prevention and fire fighting, fire skills, search and rescue and setting standards for the safety of people and their property against fire or any type of disaster.²

It is also the responsibility of the Military Firefighters, as well as other services provided by authorized institutions linked to the Unified Health System (SUS), the provision of aid and pre-hospital care, taking measures to preserve life through noninvasive techniques and use of materials and equipment.³

Due to the excellent performance in the labor activities, according to research, the corporation Firemen Military is the second institution of higher reliability of the population but only behind family.⁴ Therefore, part of your everyday handle risky situations, with the general public, and is susceptible to internal pressures, stemming from the military, and external, such as the expectation that the resolution creates during work activities. Thus, the professional Firefighter J. res.: fundam. care. online 2013. jul./set. 5(3):75-84

Military is exposed not only to physical hazards of the profession, but also the emotional and mental damage related to occupational stress.

According to the literature, there is no specific concept for stress. The term was first used in 1956 by Hans Sayle. Since then his constant propagation to other research as well as in the media, allowed different interpretations of his significado⁵. Occupational stress, and stress itself, has its well-defined concept. It is said that this is related to daily professional activities, however, was not found in the literature a definitive concept.⁶

However, there are reports in the literature that occupational stress can lead to negative feelings such as loneliness, irritability and fatigue. And also related to emotional exhaustion and Burnout syndrome.⁵

Based on this information and knowing the importance of the work of the Military Firefighters, this study aims to identify factors that predispose to develop this professional occupational stress, making it possible to propose health actions aimed at improving the quality of life in the workplace, which in turn will reflected in the improvement of care provided by firefighters. Furthermore, this study contributes to the literature for a better understanding about the occupational stress and its consequences.

METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory, descriptive, quantitative and qualitative approach. The study was conducted with 34 military fire department of a city in Minas Gerais. The volunteers were informed about the objectives of the research and then read and signed a term of informed consent.

After the execution of this, the interview is started which was divided into two parts. Primarily made up to fill in a questionnaire on

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sociodemographic variables and the second sample, containing questions regarding the topic stress, where the recorder was used in order to not lose any information.

After the interviews, the speeches were transcribed verbatim. During this process there was a loss of two interviews due to mechanical failure of the recorder, which were automatically excluded from the survey, a total of 32 interviews. Data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0 and second analysis content.⁸

This research was approved by the research ethics committee of the Federal University of Triangulo Mineiro under protocol number 1899.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Initially we will present the results for the first part of data collection, ie, the closed questions that describe the socio-economic profile of the sample.

Knowing the individuals

Of the 32 firefighters interviewed observed that: 25 (78.1%) were male and 7 (21.9%) were female. Regarding marital status, 17 (53.1%) of respondents said they were married, 10 (31.2%) were single, 2 (6.3%) cohabiting, 2 (6.3%) stable and 1 (3, 1%) divorced. As for the children, 18 (56.2%) reported having children and 14 (43.8%) did not. Of those who had children, most, 1-2 children, 88.8%.

With regard to religion, 24 (75%) reported following a religion, while 1 (3.1%) reported not having a set, 6 (18.8%) do not follow any and 1 (3.1%) ignored the question. The religion of highest incidence was Catholic with 15 (46.9%) of responses, followed by evangelical 5 (15.6%) and spiritualist 4 (12.5%).

With regard to education, 15 (46.9%) have completed high school, 14 (43.8%) completed J. res.: fundam. care. online 2013. jul./set. 5(3):75-84

higher education and 3 (9.3%) reported having another level of education. The wage income ranged from four to more than six times the minimum wage, and 18 (56.25%) of respondents reported having an income of up to four, 3 (18.75%) of up to 6 and 8 (25%) more six minimum wages. We emphasize here that the minimum wage in our country in 2011 was R \$ 545.00.

The same happened to family income, with the majority over six salaries, with 18 (56.3%) of respondents. Regarding the contribution to this income, 21 (65.6%) said that two people contributed, 8 (25%) said they are solely responsible for the income and 3 (9.4%) reported that 3 people contributed. The number of people who depend on income ranged from 1 to 5 people or more, and 8 (25%) responded that a person depends on income; 5 (15.6%) that two people are dependent; 9 (28.1 %) have three; 8 (25%) are 4:02 (6.3%) have five or more.

From the analysis units drawn from interviews with firefighters, have emerged as a result of the grouping, seven categories, namely: 1. Understanding stress 2. Stress in everyday work, 3. Interpersonal relationships; 4. Stressors, 5. Meaning of the suffering of others; 6. Emotional harm and 7. Conflicts.

Category: understanding stress

This category includes the units of analysis that highlight some signs and symptoms that identify stress:

Is physical fatigue, mental, often [...] generated by external factors [...]. (E4)

I would say that stress is a difficulty in dealing with the feelings you normally have in your day-to-day, [...] totally psychological. (E19)

Ah stress is anything that happens during the day and affects mood, behavior, health is also up [...]. (E23)

Stress [...] is when a person is in a situation where she has no control over [...] their emotional. (E34)

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Stress can be understood and conceptualized according to the context in which an individual is inserted. Thus, it can mean a stimulus, a feeling or a symptom of physical illness and / or mental.

For some authors the concept of stress is still unknown, its associated symptomatology or as something inherent in the relationship of the individual and the environment in which it operates. The first to describe on the subject was Hans Salye that later came to write theory of general adaptation syndrome general, who spoke about the effects and exposure to stress in the long term. Since then its popularity has allowed different interpretations regarding its meaning. Therefore, it is difficult to tell whether a given concept to stress is right or wrong, since the definitions do not have a consensus.

Stress can be identified as a precursor to physical and mental illness. Thus, it can be associated with the onset of dysfunction syndrome and temporomandibular Burnout⁵.

What we see is that there are various ways of interpreting the stress and consequences of this. It is noted in the reports that stress can be defined as a symptom of illness or otherwise, as the causative agent of the disease. These views can be accepted, since there is a simple definition, well defined stress built in the scientific literature.

Category: Stress in the daily work

This category comprises the units of analysis that denote particularities firefighter service, which can lead to stress, through expressions such as:

Service 24, he is already by itself a service stressed. (E3)
[...] Sometimes does not have a specific time, [...] you work at night, [...] you have accumulation of events at some time [...]. (E14)
Is excessive workload [...]. (E31)

In asking about the events of daily work that caused stress, firefighters indicated that the relationship between hours worked and overwork was an important point in the cause of stress. The military show that the workload of 24 hours to 48 hours of rest is very extensive, and they are required in many tasks during the work shift, which causes exhaustion.

The results run counter to other studies with another category of military point as exhaustive range of shifts in the corporation adopted the military. Moreover a survey in São Leopoldo - RS, not corroborates this finding, since in their results as positive brings the scale of work adopted.¹³

Regarding the shift and work schedule was found in this research that the regime of 24 hours to 48 hours of play is like something stressful daily work of these firefighters.

For these workers, the workload is extensive and comprehensive, since it requires physical and mental effort. In contrast, the rest time is short, because when they return to work routine still feel tired the last turn.

Individual differences can lead to better adapt to routine shifts, which are influenced by internal factors (age, personality, health status, etc.) and external to the individual (household, family system, activities in slacks, etc.).¹⁴

Category: interpersonal relationships.

This category considers that the military system is a factor that leads to stress in daily work.

The interpersonal relationship is another factor that contributes to the emergence of occupational stress. Speeches presented about the routines of work, lack of companionship and militarism, show that these factors hinder the shares in the team, creating disorder in everyday activities and emotional exhaustion.

According to Article 8 of the 5301 Law of the Constitution of the State of Minas Gerais, the "military hierarchy is the order and the subordination of various ranks and positions that constitute military career." Therefore, the organization of the military is governed by officialdom. However, obey a hierarchy dictated by the power of patents can harm the interpersonal relationship, mainly because there was no time for integration to occur suggestions, discussions, and even questions.

Studies also show that the system dictated by militarism, dominated the hierarchy, power and authority are downsides of working fireman, since it deprives the individual of his personality and the relationship of equality among coworkers. The data run counter to the literature because, as noted in the speech, militarism is seen as a fact of life that causes stress that comes ratify our findings.

In general, we have here an aggravating factor that is the fact that military and that sometimes you have to have a different position and deal with it and this may provide some misunderstanding that causes stress. (E18)

[...] The very militarism makes me stressed, is that you see something wrong ta, but for you to be subordinate to that person, you have to abide by the order of the oldest military or his top [...]. (E29)

It can be seen that good interpersonal remains a point of complicating, which contradicts another study found in the literature. The subjects of a study conducted in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, consider your work team and united command is accessible.¹³

The team is disunited and shows no lack of companionship, may be coming from the militaristic system. The work is based on a system that does not allow major changes in the overall positions can lead to questions, about the

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commands and organization of the institution as a whole. It is noticed that the subjects recognize the negative effects of disunity between the teams.

Category: stressing factors

This category encompasses the statements concerning the workday, but also attention on the physical space.

A key part listed as a starting point to stress is the relationship between working hours and time to rest. In the reports submitted, the time for rest are inadequate because the workload demands physical and mental effort, causing exhaustion, presented in the statements, namely:

We live here 24 hours, but are 24 voltage. Are 24 you do not have a time to relax seems like everything is fine, but we can not sleep right, [...] anytime can be called at any time something can happen [...] we are in a state of alert [...] have to stay on all the time [...]. (E5)

The activity itself. The 24 hours of work, [...] I believe that the small gap to compensate for the 24 hours of work. Already back the next day tired working already. (E26)

The stress when one is subjected to excessive load, some work excessive hours. Even when the agent is working tirelessly, sometimes even without power, and have to go through this. Is excessive physical exertion, has equal loss of sleep, rest, 24h to be of service. (E31)

Concerning the reality of service fireman, a study conducted in 2006 in Porto Alegre shows that about 74 to 81% of pre-hospital care to victims of accidents recorded are made by Military Firefighters, which corresponds to a high demand of providing their services. Added to this, there is still the actions of the organization and supervision of teams as well as the routine of 24 hours to 48 hours of rest.

Punctuate that, during service have an impaired quality of sleep. Similar to those found in other studies with Military Firefighters, where

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the interrupted sleep is a stressor that can diminish the quality of work life.¹¹⁻¹³

Compared with nursing teams, it is observed that the stress is related to the ability to adapt to routine shifts and length of service. Other factors also contribute to the onset of stress is the routine work, and the amount of effective supervisory and management positions.¹⁷

It is noticed that the demand for labor within 24 hours of required work is seen by respondents as heavy and exhaustive demand for physical and mental effort in organizing and developing activities. This may predispose to stress, since it puts professionals in stressful situations imminent.

Category: meaning of the suffering of others.

This category corresponds to the answers mental, psychological and social performance of these professionals on daily activities, which spanned the units of analysis, of which we highlight the following:

Well, that gets to mess with me, leaving my psychological slightly shaken, is sometimes grab an accident where I find a dead child, or seriously injured, then reaches to shake a little, [...] we feels a pang, so it's something that makes you wonder if we ta doing is legal or not, although I agree that it is legal. (E13)

[...] Deal with the pressure to tinker with injured victims, people in distress, people always asking for help, for me it can be a stress factor. (E19)

[...] Directly deal with the pain of the human being or an event of greater vulnerability, most of the time. (E25)

Such events lead to a feeling of great responsibility for / with someone else's life. A study conducted in Sao Carlos - SP points to make calls in instances that require psychological preparation without him, that can lead to trauma consequently be reflected in everyday life. Another study also shows that the profession requires the firefighter physical fitness, J. res.: fundam. care. online 2013. jul./set. 5(3):75-84

emotional, psychological and social interaction for the human suffering detriment to love the profession.¹³

There is even death situations. In literature, we found a literature review, conducted with students of nursing, in which we analyze the relationship of the subject with the issue of death and dying. The research shows that many consider it their duty to fight against death, and that death is synonymous with failure. Moreover, in certain cases it is necessary to deal with the feelings of family members as well as their own feelings about this situation. This was also observed during this study.

The feeling of responsibility to the other's life overlaps with professionalism during situations that carry a risk of death to other humans. These situations require emotional preparation because it is necessary but provide care to victims with rationality, however, not be forgotten that those who wear the uniform is also a human being, endowed with feelings.

[...] Are other events that you go and someone dies, leaves you shaken. (E10)

I felt lost loved ones, being already working in service I have ever witnessed, a friend who died colleague who died of service, is that sometimes people [...] we identify with the person and do not forget. "(E19)

We are ... dealing with loss. Daily losses or not, even loss of life, [...] is a sense of helplessness, [...] of the mission was not accomplished with time, even though she was not always in our hands. It is continuing the life of a person and ensure that they live. (E25)

Category: emotional harm

This category corresponds to statements that express results for emotional damages arising from stress, according to the statements below.

[...] Has several moments that we become more debilitated, or is more introspective, say so, but believing in us. (E3)

[...] Signs of sadness, you can not sleep right, you do not feel like returning to your workplace, sometimes, when you arrive, your mood is not the mood you would like to be exhibiting. (E6)

Mainly lose sleep. I lose much sleep. (E8)

Every day we suffer right, sometimes we do not even know why, but we always suffer a bit. (E17)

Nervously, the damage I have is that I get nervous. (E20)

It was reported insomnia, nervousness and sadness related to as one of the emotional damage resulting from stress. The military has reported that, when they are irregularly stressed tend to sleep.

Stress can be the cause of insomnia in nursing assistants, occasionally or frequently go through situations when life events, stress producers. This actually Fireman Military service can be experienced at any moment, because in their activities often put their lives at risk to protect the property and assets of the company, with responsibility beyond the life of another person.

The difficulty sleeping or have quality sleep has been reported as a symptom of stress by 47.62% of respondents to a survey of nursing staff. This fact described in this study, the subjects believe that insomnia is caused by stress and not vice versa.

Can we establish a relationship between stress, difficulty sleeping and poor sleep quality and that it is perceived and felt by those who live with it. Furthermore, it is known that such problems could bring serious damage to physical and mental health of the individual.

Category: Conflicts

These units of analysis describe the changes in the profession because their members in interpersonal and social relationships.

The influence of work on family relationships was another emotional damage mentioned by firefighters. The stress suffered during the day is transported to the home environment, which can have disastrous consequences for family relationships. It is often difficult to separate the feelings experienced in the workplace and in family and social environment.

A study of workers of all categories in Portugal shows that it is possible to have a good management aspects between work and family. According to the survey, when asked about the work-family balance, 46% of respondents reported being "good" and 18% "very good". However, data obtained in this study indicate that occupational stress interferes in personal and family life of firefighters being mentioned as an emotional harm.

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The literature that brings family participates in forming the identity of the individual. Approval of choices for someone that is estimated, is extremely positivo²². Therefore, there is a family relationship that ends-work causing relationship problems and even separations "[...] I was married and divorced there, this period was stressful, very stressful."

Thus, conflicts of family life can be related to stress in the workplace. Both are interconnected by the individual who acts in both environments. It is perceived difficulty separating means and these influences, the personality of the individual.

As seen, some military reported impassivity emotional feeling that acquired after living with the human suffering that results from the imposition of being impartial and rational during an occurrence. A study shows that, in the perception of a group of firefighters, caring for life and property of the society is his highest duty, exceeding the limits of "extinguishing".²²

There is also the burden of being the military and often considered a "hero" in society. One who does not complain, and do not feel is always ready to save lives. Over time, they feel that this influences their behavior in the family, but what is the work overlaps leaving aside the emotional aspects that permeate their lives in the events, which can be seen in the account of one interviewee, "[...] So we have to be very cold, [...] sometimes we end up taking it into the house. "

What makes the exhausting, sometimes, is the need to camouflage feelings and demonstrate strength and courage always. Being in an environment where demonstrate feelings of compassion is seen as weakness, can cause mental suffering, as one interviewee said:

[...] We can not get emotional with certain situations at the time of the activity, [...] even have to deny our human condition, which has the same

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feeling, so I can meet a person who is in need of our service [...].

CONCLUSION

It was found in this study that 78.1% were male and 21.9% female. Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents were married, 53.1%. With respect to children, 56.2% reported having children and 88.8% of these have 1-2 children. Referring to religion 75% reported following a religion, the most prevalent religion Catholic 46.9% of respondents. Regarding education, 46.9% have completed high school and 43.8% have a university degree. With respect to income, 56.25% of respondents reported having an income of up to four minimum wages and family income over six salaries, with 56.3% of respondents.

It is worth noting that there is a general consensus that being a professional firefighter military predisposes to stress. Regarding the relationship, this study allowed us to state that the change in behavior of these professionals, occurs due to the adaptation of the same system of work in this category.

Another aspect that caught our attention spans behavior of these professionals facing the death situation, when they demonstrate a weakness in dealing with the emotional human side X, which is reflected in the family environment.

Many professionals who participated in this study reported having some kind of emotional damage, stress arising in the performance of their activities. We suggest at the end of this research, propose actions and strategies, such as counseling, sports and recreational activities in order to minimize the side effects caused by daily work that can compromise the psychic life, social and professional military firefighter.

Importantly, there is a dearth of theoretical and scientific. Occupational stress is still little explored in the academic, research being restricted, often to healthcare professionals.

Additionally, this research, like others, points out that any professional could be subject to workplace stress. The Military Firefighters express, feel and express stress in different ways, and realize when they are with occupational stress. Other investigations are needed on this issue to practices in promoting the quality of life of these professionals and also to propose effective health actions that minimize

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